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ABSTRACT

The Leda Study, a research project, examined Sweden's team teaching system. The working conditions of teacher teams in different types of school organizations are described, with a focus on group decision-making and problem-solving processes. Methodology involved observations of teacher teams in four schools; interviews with teachers, team leaders, and principals; and document analysis. Schools were classified according to a model of school organization based on the categories of organic/hierarchic organization and organizational tightness. Four teacher responsibilities were examined: instructional planning; pupil welfare; democratic cooperation between students and staff; and task origin. Findings indicate that each teaching team handled the tasks recommended by the curriculum but assigned them different meanings. Greater degrees of hierarchical school organization corresponded with increased dependence upon external authority. In organically structured schools, internally originated tasks facilitated an increase in team authority and autonomy and in perceptions of work as relevant. A conclusion is that an inherent conflict exists between the traditional hierarchical organization of Swedish schools and the organically functioning teacher teams, accentuating the need for organic organization of the schools. Two figures and one table are included. (13 references) (LMI)

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TEACHER COOPERATION AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION: WHEN AND WHY DO TEACHERS COOPERATE?

PAPER TO BE PRESENTED AT THE AERA-CONFERENCE
CHICAGO, 1991

ABSTRACT

The focus in this paper is teachers' cooperation in teacher teams. Two teacher teams in two different school organizations are compared in two aspects: what tasks they perform and where their tasks originate. Data collection is done primarily by observations during teacher team meetings.

The organization of the two schools was defined according to a model taking into account degree of hierarchy and distinctness of organizational structure. One school was defined as hierachic/indistinct and the other as organic/distinct.

On the surface the teams at both schools handled the same tasks during their meetings, namely those prescribed by the Compulsory School Curriculum. However, qualitative analysis of utterances during team meetings revealed differences between the two teams in the ways the tasks were treated. The team at the organic/distinct school had a greater sense that the teacher team had decision making authority than at the hierarchic/indistinct school, and they dealt with more tasks that orginated within the team.

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Outline of this Paper

It has been suggested that if the working conditions for teachers included more time for common problem-solving, the traditional problem of isolation in teachers' work would be minimized, and the field of teaching would become more professional, Little (1982), Campbell & Southworth (1990).

Based on this view, a system of teacher teams was introduced to the Swedish compulsory school system ten years ago. However, the implementation of this system has not been an unqualified success. A possible explanation is that the educational background of the teachers and the existing organizational structure of the schools often do not provide the right conditions for a system of teacher teams to function effectively: Swedish schooling is traditionally organized on a hierarchical pattern, which may not provide a supportive enviroment for collective work.

To examine this possibility, a research project entitled the Leda Study (Swedish abbreviation for leadership in teacher teams) was carried out in Sweden during the years 1986-1989. The present paper reports on a portion of that study. In the paragraphs that follow, a background and overview of the Leda Study will be presented, including a description of the research method. Subsequently a portion of the results from the study is discussed, addressing the topics of 1) planning of instruction, 2) pupil welfare, 3) democratic cooperation between pupils and staff and 4) the origin of tasks.

Background

For the past ten years, teachers in Swedish compulsory schools have been organized into a system called teacher teams. According to this system, they have the opportunity to meet during regular working hours to dicuss and decide about common matters in their work. Each teacher team is responsible for a small number of classes, which can vary from two to nine. Such a working unit, a teacher team and its classes, is sometimes said to constitute a "small school" within the larger school. The sphere of activity of the teacher teams is set and regulated in the Compulsory School Curriculum, which is established at a national level. According to

the national policy, teacher teams have the responsibility for the planning of instruction, welfare of the pupils, and the forms and content of democratic cooperation between pupils and staff.

The number of members in each teacher team differs; it is usually between eight and fourteen. At the lower and intermediate level of compulsory school (ages 7 to 13) the number of members tends to be smaller, whereas at the upper level (ages 13 to 16), there are sometimes more than fourteen members in one team. The team usually meets about once a fortnight, sometimes more often and sometimes less. One teacher in each team is selected to be team leader. The team leader is given more working hours to commit to teacher team work. According to the policy of democratic cooperation between pupils and staff, pupils are entitled to be represented at the meetings in the same number as the teachers, at least once every term.

One of the objectives in introducing the system of teacher teams to Swedish schools was to increase the power and authority of teachers to handle their own work. Rather than having decisions made and regulated by a central administrative authority, and then carried out by teachers working individually, the intention was to turn greater responsibility over to the teacher team as a collective decision-making body.

However, since the introduction of this system there has been a good deal of confusion and resistence to this change in the level of authority and responsibility. In particular, the trade union representing the teachers at the upper level of compulsory school has questioned the effectiveness of such a system. Many teachers are of the opinion that their main task is to instruct the pupils, and to plan for that instruction individually. They have difficulties to see that the mission of the teacher teams and working units has any real significance for their daily work. The individual basis of their work has not been willingly abandoned in favour of a system of collective authority.

Educational research indicates that teachers in Sweden and elsewhere have been educated in a system that puts primary emphasis on individual work, and have been accustomed to working conditions in which they handle their problems and daily work alone. This matter is described for example by Sarason (1971), Lortie (1975), Hargreaves (1982), Hargreaves (1990).

Presentation of the Leda Study

In order to examine this problem, a research project entitled the Leda Study was carried out during the years 1986 to 1989. In this study, four teacher teams in four different schools were followed during the course of one year. The teacher teams included in the study were in the upper level of compulsory school, at "ordinary" schools where the principals and teachers were all positive to the study.

The purpose of the Leda Study was to describe the working conditions for the teachers and leaders in the teacher teams in different types of school organizations. With this in mind, a number of questions were formulated:

What type of tasks do the teachers handle together?
Who decides what they are going to discuss during the meetings?
What role is played by the team leader?
How does the team leader handle the leadership of colleagues of the same status as him/herself?
What is the pattern of discussion in the teams and what are their solutions to the problems they are faced with? In other words: How is the process of problem-solving carried out when the teachers work together?

A model for school organization

To describe the different kinds of school organization, a classification of two different types was used: hierarchic and organic. The criteria included in this classification included matters such as the schoolwork situation of the pupils, how the teachers worked and looked upon their work tasks, and how the authority and control of the school administration was carried out. There were ten criteria in total.

Another aspect of school organization considered in the study was its degree of "tightness", Schlechty (1976) or to which degree the organization is visible and distinct. There were also ten criteria for this aspect, including such topics as how the school accommodates its overall objectives to the local situation, the function of the teacher team leaders, and the routines for conferences in the school.

A model based on both the categories of organic/hierarchic organization and tightness was developed and functioned as a background for the interpretation of the data, Granström (1991).

Method

The collection of data included three different methods: observations, interviews, and analysis of written documents.

The main source of data was from observations of teacher teams. There were two observers, each of whom followed two teacher teams. Primarily they followed the regular meetings of the team but also followed other meetings and conferences in the schools, such as subject assessment meetings, and staff committee meetings.

The routines for teacher team meetings in the four schools were different. In one school the teacher team met every week. In the others they met more seldom, about once every three weeks. Meeting times varied between 40 to 90 minutes. During the observation period the numbers of meetings varied from six to fourteen, and the total time for the meetings from six to nearly fifteen hours.

The observations from the meetings were written down, utterance by utterance, in shorthand notes. The person who made the utterance was also noted. Every topic discussed was noted, as well as how long the topic was dealt with. Following each observed meeting, on the same day, the handwritten notes were prepared in typewritten form. No tape recorder was used during the observations, in order to disturb the regular procedures of the meetings as little as possible. The purpose of the observations was to get the message in the utterances, and the context in which they were said. To do observations in this way to get a picture of the natural situation in schoolwork is documented by for example Hammersley (1980) and Hammersley & Atkinson (1983).

According to Patton (1983), there are five possible ways in which observation may be carried out. The approach used in the Leda Study was that the observer was an "outsider", and was not a participant in the process being observed. The observer was visible to the observed persons, answered questions, but took no initiatives to communication. The observation was open, in the meaning that the observed persons were aware that observations were being made, could see that notes were being taken, and were acquainted with the observer. They also knew the purpose of the observations.

This kind of study where teacher teams are observed during ordinary meetings is unique to Sweden. There are studies that focus on the working conditions of teachers, school organization and teacher teams, but the data are from interviews, documents, and questionnaires, Berg et al (1987). There are also studies that theoretically discuss the duties for and intentions of teacher teams in compulsory schools, linked to the study of

the overall goals for and development of the compulsory school, Kallos (1985).

Interviews were also carried out in the Leda Study. The interviews were with teachers, teacher team leaders, and principals. All of the interviews were tape recorded. In the dimension of data collection involving written documents, materials collected included time tables, and minutes from different meetings in the schools.

Once the observations were completed, the two observers classified the four schools according to the model developed by Granström (1991), both observers making descriptions of schools according to the specified criteria. The four descriptions were compared with one another side by side. It is important to say that the categorization of the schools is only valid in relative terms, for the purposes of making organizational distinctions between the four schools. The observers were able to notice differences between the schools after only a few visits, but it wasn't until the schools were considered against the framework of the model that the nature of the differences became more apparent.

Results

In this paper, a portion of the results from the Leda Study are discussed. The two variables reported on are the tasks dealt with by the teacher teams during the meetings, and the origin of the tasks. Two teacher teams will be compared: one in the school with the most hierarchic/indistinct pattern, and the other one in the school with the most organic/visible pattern.

Tasks which the teacher teams deal with

Classification of the tasks of the teacher teams was derived from the description of teacher team responsibilities set out in the Compulsory School Curriculum. Classification was divided into five different areas of interest: planning of instruction, pupil welfare, democratic cooperation between pupils and staff, the working conditions for the teachers themselves, and resources. In this paper, only the first three groups are discussed.

Under the "*Planning of instruction*" topic, were included for example discussions about thematic studies, revision of the local plans and objectives for the school, study trips, anti-drug campaigns, and end-of-term activities.

Tasks included under the topic "*Pupil welfare*" included those dealing with pupils with special needs, difficult-to-manage classes, and discussions about contact with the parents, etc.

Tasks included under the topic "*Democratic cooperation between pupils and staff*" included rules for the pupils' daily life in school, and how the pupils would be able to influence the school work.

The two observers read all the reports from the observations and classified the tasks independently. The correlation between the evaluations was r=0,96 (Spearman). In total 210 matters were observed and classified. The distribution between the three groups of tasks in the two teacher teams can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of tasks

Teacher team	Planning of instruction	Pupil welfare	Democratic cooperation between pupils and staff
hierachic/ indistinct	16	5	4
organic/distinct	39	22	10

To just compare the number of tasks can be misleading as it does not say anything about how the teams treat the tasks. One way to get more information about the handling of the tasks is to look at how much time the teams devote to different tasks. This can be seen in Figure 1.

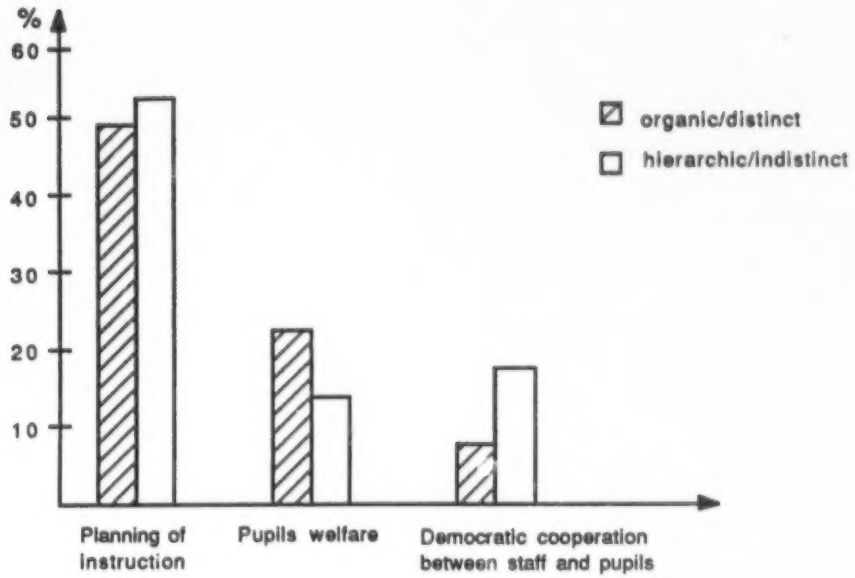

Figure 1
Time devoted to different tasks in the hierachic/indistinct and the organic/visible school.

At a first glance the team with a hierachic/indistinct pattern seems to devote its time in a high degree to the same tasks as the school with the organic/visible organization. In both cases they are within the sphere of activity that the Compulsory School Curriculum prescribes.

However when the utterances from the two teacher teams were analysed by a qualitative method differences were found in the ways the tasks were treated. The teacher team in the organic/visible organization handled the tasks that are classified to the group "*Planning of instruction*" as tasks they were responsible to handle. They also had the means to act on the decisions they had made. The initiative to work with the matters often came from the teachers in the team themselves; all were involved and had an interest to find solutions that everyone in the team could accept. The teacher team in the organic/visible organization had a written plan which regulates the work. The team evaluated their work against it regularly and were allowed to change it as well!

The team in the hierachic/indistinct school had the conception that the responsibility for the tasks was outside the team and that they were supposed to simply discuss the matter, not to decide or act on any decision. When the team discussed matters about "Planning of instruction" they often were told to do so from the principals. These circumstances affected the teachers' commitment to the work in the team.

Common to both of the teams is that the tasks that were assigned to the group "Planning of instruction" involved hardly any questions that really dealt with direct instruction in the classroom. Mostly the matters were about extracurricular tasks.

"*Pupil welfare*" was dealt with to about the same extent in the two teacher teams. But even here there were visible differences in the way the teams worked with the problem-solving process. The teachers in the organic/visible organization knew all the pupils that belonged to the unit. They were thus all able to provide the analysis of the pupils' situation with relevant facts and impressions from different viewpoints. Out of the analyses they tested possible solutions, what consequences they could have, and how realistic they were in improving the pupil's school situation. The teacher team had means at their disposal and could rearrange the resourse allocation to some extent, when needed. For the pupils with special needs, there were plans for how to handle their problems in the long term and those plans were regulary on the agenda of the teacher team meetings. On some occasions the team even discussed a whole group of pupils, for example how to make a class function in a better way socially.

The teachers in the hierachic/indistinct school didn´t have all the pupils in common. Because of that it was difficult to discuss pupils: several of the teachers didn´t know them at all, and were not interested in or able to contribute to the analysis of the situation of the pupils. In this school, for this kind of matters, they had a pupil case conference. Here not all the teachers are present, just the form teacher, the remedial teacher, principals and the team for special care. When this kind of matter is discussed in the team, it is about whole classes of pupils and mostly how they behave, how their social life is, and very seldom how they learn or how they are taught.

Concerning the variable "*Democratic cooperation between pupils and staff*" there are great differences between the two teams as well. In the hierachic/indistinct school the teacher team has been given the task from the school adminstration to discuss rules for how the influence and caretaking of the pupils shall be regulated. In the organic/visible school the teacher team has discussed which concrete steps they wanted to take themselves to widen the responsibility and the influence of the pupils. This teacher team had representatives from the pupils present at every meeting. The important meaning of this task was completely different for the two teams.

Origin of tasks

The tasks for the teacher team can either orginate within the team itself or come from outside, for example from the school administration. The distribution of the sources of the tasks can tell us something about to which extent the teacher teams are directed from "inside" or "outside". Figure 2 shows the result of such distribution.

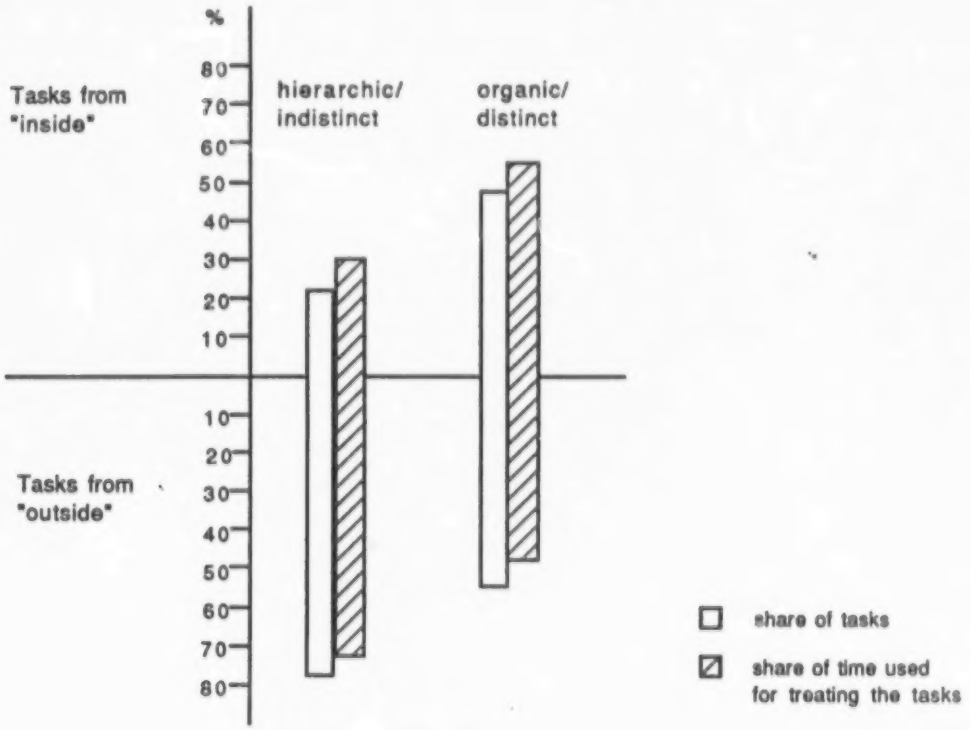

Figure 2
The share of tasks coming from "inside" and "outside" and the share of time used for treating the tasks.

In the teacher team in the hierachic/indistinct school most of the tasks come from outside, especially from the school administration. This team meet quite seldom but still they use just a fourth of their time for their "own matters".

For the teacher team working in the school with a more organic/visible pattern there is a balance in the distribution between tasks coming from "inside" and "outside" and in the time they devote to them. The team has an agenda that partly can make it more easy for the members to bring in

their own questions and problems. At the same time many matters come also from "outside". The teacher team is included in the decision-making process of the school and functions as an "information channel" from the school administration to staff and pupils - partly because the team meets regularly every week.

Discussion

The results show that the two teams both handle the tasks which the curriculum recommends in the authority of the teacher team and the working units. A more thorough analysis shows that the tasks have different meanings in the two school cultures. The more hierarchic the school organization is, the more time the teacher team gives to matters that have not been surfaced by the teachers themselves. Instead they give time to matters that come from "outside", mostly from the principals. An intepretation of this is that the members of a more hierachical school organization are more dependent on external authority and more inclined to dutifully treat the matters that are placed before them, even when they think the matters are not very important to them. The work of the team has the feeling of "make-believe games" and the members of the teacher team do not get any profits from it.

The proportion between the tasks coming from "outside" and "inside" is a mirror of the grade of autonomy and authority in the teacher team. Autonomy and authority are in this case the power of the teacher team to initiate, decide, plan and carry out proceedings. This is the situation in the more organic school organization where the teachers use the team situation to handle matters that are important to them. This makes the work in the teacher team meaningful for them. The work becomes "real work".

This study gives no evidence for the idea that personal characteristics have any important influence on the differences in the two teacher teams. It is mainly the working conditions for the teachers in the schools that shape the work in the teacher teams, what tasks they handle, where the tasks originate and the value the teachers place on cooperation in their daily work in school.

Swedish schools traditionally have been organized according to a hierarchical pattern, in which the distribution of power and authority is rigid, but not distinctly spelled out. For teacher teams to function well, a more organic system of organization is required, where the pattern of authority is more negotiable and apparent to its members. When the system of teacher teams was introduced, no efforts were made to modify the existing hierarchical pattern. The persistence of the hierarchical

pattern makes it difficult for teachers to use the potential opportunities available in their time together, because they cannot see the point of it. It has not been made clear in an operational way what the limits and functions of the teacher teams are expected to be, nor what they have the authority to decide about. In other words, many teachers are not sure about the tasks and responsibilities of the teacher team. This does not provide a positive base for a system of common problem solving. Moreover, the distribution of hierachical authority is not significantly altered, and the principal has the last word anyway.

In schools which are organized more organically and where the pattern is more obvious for those who work there, the concept of teacher teams is easier to realize and their overall purpose more often can be reached.

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